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ABSTRACT

This document is a report on WebReady, an online program that provides students with the essential skills needed to function effectively in Internet-based classes. The WebReady program consists of seven interactive lessons that instruct students on how to: (1) use the full capabilities of the Web browser; (2) perform critical searches on the Internet; (3) send and receive e-mail; (4) send and receive file/graphic attachments through e-mail; (5) compress and decompress files/programs; (6) access PDF files or documents; and (7) participate in online discussion groups. The program includes background reading, visual aides, and quizzes to help ensure student skill competency. The program also provides instructor assistance and feedback, which helps generate a favorable impression of online learning. The entire program can be completed in 16 hours or less, depending on the existing ability of the learner. Overall, the program is designed to help prepare and increase the chances of success for students enrolling in online classes. The program will assist instruction of online courses by freeing instructors from using valuable class time to teach students how to use or access Internet resources. The report includes feedback from program completers, a FAQ section, and a Web site for guests to try the program. (MKF)

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WebReady - Essential Skills for Taking Internet-based Classes
Student Success - Course Design
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# WebReady

## Essential Skills for Taking Internet–based Classes

**The Problem**

As more and more instructors deliver all or part of their course information online, more and more students are finding they're simply not prepared to use the online tools, materials and resources instructors are making available to them. Consequently, instructors must use valuable class time, the first few weeks of each course, teaching students how to access their materials on the Internet, use email attachments, web forms, discussion boards, chat rooms, and so on. Unfortunately, those students who don't "get it" quietly drop the class rather than admit their Internet illiteracy.

**The Solution**

Prepare students using an online "prep" course in which they can experience the online environment, practice and demonstrate each basic skill that will be required in a course that is all or partly web-based. For example, **WebReady**, a self-paced, open-entry/open-exit online computer literacy class, initiated summer 2001, quickly prepares students to receive online instruction. An online course accessible from any Internet-ready computer, WebReady consists of an introduction to online learning and seven interactive lessons which teach students how to use the full capabilities of their browser; how to perform critical searches on the Internet; how to send and receive email with attachments; how to compress and decompress files; how to access PDF files; how to effectively participate in discussion board activities and more!

**The Benefit**

**Students** who are prepared to communicate, exchange files and collaborate online, have better chances of succeeding in courses that use Web-assisted learning. **Instructors** who teach webready-students have the freedom needed to use the Internet with confidence, knowing their students will be able to access their sites and participate in the learning activities created for them. **Employers** who hire our Internet-savvy graduates can be assured that their new employees will be well-prepared to use the Internet to do research, communicate with clients and collaborate in the workplace.

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## Course Contents

Learning and acquiring basic skills for online interaction requires a small time investment in doing background reading, practicing and demonstrating acquired skills.

**WebReady**, for example, covers the following:
http://ctlonline.net/webreadyguest/courseinfo.html

Pretest

Learning Online - What's Involved?

- Scheduling study time
- Reserving computer time
- Managing files and folders
- Adapting learning style to the Web environment
- Finding resources to deal with technical & access barriers
- Providing feedback during and after the course

Using a Browser to View Course Web Pages

- Locating your browser's toolbars and associating the button icons with their functions
- Customizing your browser and using its timesaving functions
- Orienting yourself to WebReady's course web site

Searching the Internet

- Locating Web resources on Internet; understanding what the Internet is - background and history
- Making use of Explorer's, Netscape's and AOL's tutorial sites with in depth information about using their browsers.
- Using powerful search engines and their search syntax to get results
- Understanding how your campus library's data base resources can assist your academic searches
- Applying strategies to do an Internet search project

Receiving and Sending Email

- Distinguishing the various ways your browser can be used to send web page forms.
- Determining the pros and cons of web mail vs. client email
- Checking the compatibility of your email client/webmail account's with web page forms
- Sending an email with a properly filled in "subject line"

Receiving and Sending Attached Assignments

- Reading background information about issues related to opening email attachments
- Demonstrating the ability to receive and open email with attachments
- Determining the file format that will work best in any given situation
- Selecting the best file type for an assignment and sending the attachment

Decompressing and Compressing Files

- Discovering the advantages to decompressing and compressing text and graphic files
- Using web resource sites for decompression and compression programs
- Demonstrating the ability to download and open compressed files

- Compressing and sending files using online trial versions of compression software

Using Acrobat Reader to Receive Course Materials

- Getting the latest version of Acrobat Reader
- Discovering the many uses of PDF documents
- Finding out how Acrobat PDF documents are commonly used in the online classroom
- Submiting an assignment using a PDF document.

Using a Discussion Board to Collaborate

- Locating new features of our Discussion Boards
- Analyzing the dynamics of discussion - review techniques for keeping a discussion going
- Posting topics and finding out what "threads" are
- Learning ways to embellish postings with links and pictures
- Participating in a web site sharing project

Post test

**Lesson Content**

Each lesson clearly states its objectives and includes:

- background reading
- visual aides,
- resource links
- study-quizzes
- a knowledge quiz (50% auto-corrected; 50% instructor verified)
- skill /competency checks (instructor verified).

The student can only continue to the next lesson when the prior one is 100% correct.

**Competency Based**

The course design is competency based. Because the objective of the online prep-course is to check each student for basic skills required for web course interaction, a student who already has these skills should be allowed to progress though the course as quickly as the student's skills will allow.

**WebReady** includes a "Fast Track" link allowing students to skip background reading and advance directly to the assignments to check knowledge and competency. A student can opt to take the "Fast Track" (self-place); however, if the student cannot pass the knowledge and competency checkpoints, the student will be sent back to redo the assignment, using background reading links referenced by the instructor.

**Student Time Involved**

Course completion varies between 2 to 16 hours depending on existing skills. Students who feel very confident using the Internet can demonstrate "competency" and complete the course in a couple hours. Other students with more limited experience might need 16 hours.

Students in **WebReady** have often have said they ended up spending a bit more time than expected because they became engaged in reading resource links and

finding solutions to nagging problems they had experienced.

**Instructor Time Involved**

Instructor presence in this kind of "prep" course is very important because this is often the first impression a student has of online learning. Automated courses can discourage initiative. Five instructor-contact points were put into the **WebReady** course, not only to build rapport but to verify the competencies being tested: receipt of a web form, an email, an attached file, a compressed file and discussion board posts. Vague, poorly thought-out responses are often received in the first student-instructor contact point which is the fourth assignment of this course. Students expecting an automated response are surprised to find an instructor actively involved: "I've tried a couple of other courses . . . and never got a response, so guess I really didn't expect one this time either."

Contact time per student averages 30 minutes for the 8 lesson, approximately 16-hour course. Time varies depending on individual need which may include questions, nag-notices, administrative snags.

**Does it Work?**

So far the majority of responses have been positive.

*"I learned a great deal about working on the internet -- more from this class than if I learned on my own "winging it".*

*"You should consider making it a requirement for any student taking an online course to cover, because there were concepts in every chapter that could help a student be more efficient."*

*"This type of course is an absolute must for first time online users unless the instructor wants to take lot of time with the technical aspects. I found this course invaluable for myself personally as an online student and as a counselor of students with learning disabilities and other disabilities. I will highly recommend it before they try an on-line course. It also gives one the experience of checking out their equipment and most importantly, builds confidence in being able to solve problems that they might encounter in their other courses and I know their completion rates would be higher if they have completed an orientation course first.*

*"I just went through WebReady. It was extremely impressive! Like at most colleges, this would fill a huge need for our students."*

*"This site was easy to navigate, and very informative. I have recommended this class to my friend, who likes computers, and my computer illiterate mother."*

*"I think it is extraordinary! It was thorough, with good background reading, and resources if needed. I have taken several on line courses heretofore, but still learned*

*new concepts and ways of transmitting and receiving educational information. I appreciated the time and thought and effort that has gone into preparing this exceptional course."*

*"Thanks for the support and guidance during the WebReady Course. First of all, It was one of the best organized programs I have taken. There are no weak spots in it that I could find. In fact, it is so professional that I kept wondering what large software company organized and put it together, only to see in the post review that it was done right here at home, by SMCCD. Congratulations!!"*

**FAQs**

*Did instructors find that the students who took the course were better prepared?* Yes. In some cases, the students offered the instructors solutions for troubleshooting the opening of file attachments.

*What percentage of students are completers?* Over three semesters - 61%. Non-completers get a NC (no credit) for the course. At the same time, non-completers realize that they may not be good candidates for taking an online class (whether due to out-dated hardware, insufficient skills or simply preference for on-campus classes.)

*Are students required to take this course?* No. At present, we have no way of requiring this as a prerequisite. Online instructors recommend WebReady at their introductory meetings. Some even take their students into campus labs and log them in to start them out.

*Are instructors required to take the course?* No, some go through it just to become familiar with the content. We have a separate course for our instructors called "WebSavvy" which contains 25 modules covering Basic Internet to Creating an Instructional web site. It is recommended but not required.

*How long does it take to develop a course like this?* Anywhere from 1500 to 2000 hours. Our first version took six months to develop. It was labor intensive requiring the instructor to check, respond to and record every email and every submission. The second and current version took another three months. It is auto-mated with five instructor-student contact points. It works off a database which logs students in, keeps track of their progress and auto-checks their quizzes.

*What kind of software did you use?* Dreamweaver UltraDev was used to create the webpages and Ultradev works together with an Access database to login and track the progress of each student. PanFora was used for the discussion board. Adobe Acrobat is used in the PDF lesson.

*What kind of support / funding did you get from your college to create the course?* As web & instructional support for district faculty (salaried coordinators for the

Centers for Teaching and Learning) , we developed this course to ease the burden of our faculty so that they could spend more time teaching their disciplines not the technology. Once the project was underway, we received nods of approval from the vice presidents of instruction, the division deans and cheers from faculty teaching online.

**Non-completers**

Equipment, anxiety and time are the three largest factors which have kept students from completing the course.

**Equipment**

Some students do not have up-to-date equipment at home, sufficient access to the home computer (family competition for computer time), or the necessary software (an up-to-date operating system and/or word processor.) In such cases, students are referred to college campus resource centers, such as libraries and learning centers.

**Anxiety**

Of 120 students, two required daily email exchanges, "hand-holding" and one required a campus meeting to overcome anxiety. Both suggested in their final surveys that the course be offered alternatively in a computer lab environment. Another 10 emailed the instructor in advance to make sure there was someone "there".

**Time**

Of 120 students, 39% were non-completers – many responding, "too much to do, too little time".

Other factors include low need (signed up but never followed through); relocation (trips, moves) and illness. Having encountered these 'snags', these students will be better able to answer the question: "Is an online course right for you?"

**Try it Out**

A "guest" site has been created for you to try. Enter the URL below, click "sign in" and your in! Have a look, or take the course and see if you can pick up some useful trouble-shooting tips that will make your delivery of course materials on the Web easier.

http://CTLonline.net/webreadyguest/

WebReady June 2001

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